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My Inquiry Meeting,

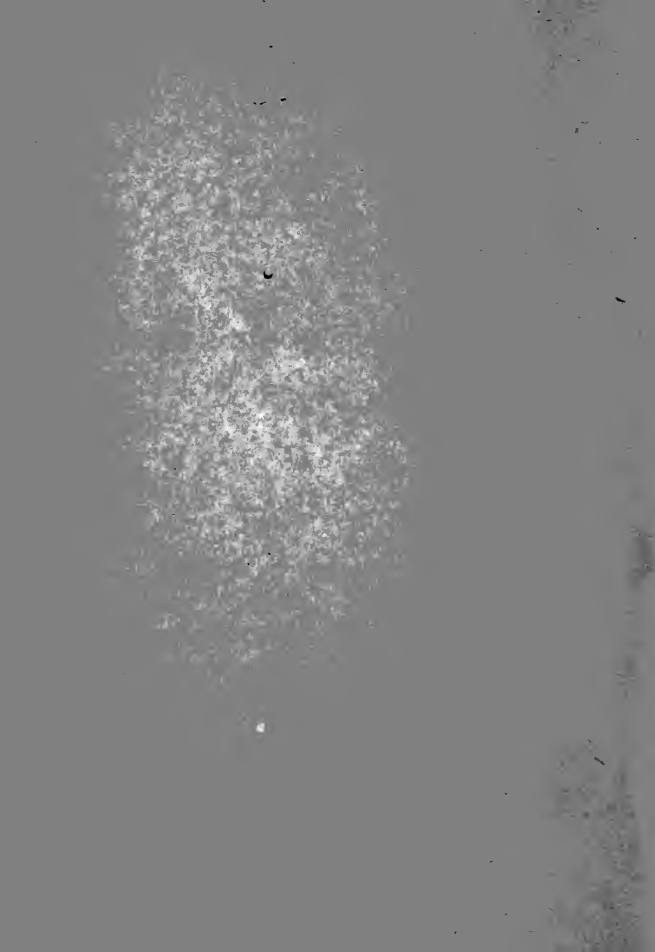
BY ROBERT BOYD, D. D.

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



MY
INQUIRY MEETING;

OR
Plain Truths for Anxious Souls
Saved or unsaved;

BY
ROBERT BOYD, D. D.

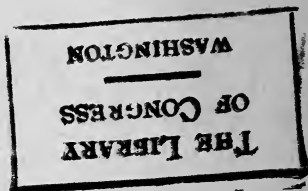
Author of World's Hope, Young Converts &c. &c.

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MY INQUIRY MEETING.

INTRODUCTION.

DURING the many years that God permitted me to occupy the responsible and delightful position of a Christian Pastor, it was my habit to have a meeting for inquirers every Monday evening, both in summer and winter, in times of revival, and in times when there was no special religious interest. I found that this plan had many advantages. It led me to aim at the conversion of souls all the time, and to prepare my sermons with that object in view; while the impenitent in my congregation were led to feel that I was praying and looking for their conversion, that they ought to come to Christ at once, and that they need not wait for a series of special ser-

vices, nor till large numbers were joining the Church, to secure the salvation of their souls.

Accordingly the notice for this meeting was given out regularly from the pulpit, the same as that of the weekly prayer meeting. I was at pains to explain that the meeting was not to be confined to souls in an anxious state about their personal salvation but was open to Christians who were in any perplexity about religious subjects or any thing that was disturbing their peace of mind, or hindering their growth in grace. Even persons troubled with sceptical doubts were urged to come and have a candid talk with me. The result was I was seldom without inquirers, and the conversations on these occasions greatly helped me in preparations for the pulpit. They gave me something to aim at of a definite character, and made my sermons more practical than they might otherwise have been.

I have thought that it might be both interesting and profitable to record some of the conversations at these meetings. In doing this however, I do not pretend to give the very words uttered by either the inquirer or myself; but only the general line of thought that was given.

MY INQUIRY MEETING.

CHAPTER I.

SINNING AGAINST LIGHT.

Inquirer.—I have been to hear you preach a good deal of late, sir, and hearing your invitation last evening I thought I would come and see you; though I fear there is no hope for my poor soul.

Pastor.— I am glad you came, but what makes you think that your case is so hopeless?

I.—Well, I have been a great sinner; have sinned against light and knowledge; have sinned deeply since I came to this city, and last evening under the sermon the sins of my whole life came up before me in black array, so that I felt that I was a lost man.

P.—I am very glad that you see sin to be a great evil. It is the abominable thing which God hates; the only thing that God is said to hate. If God were to let us see all the evil

that is in our hearts, we could not endure the sight. Still, no one with the New Testament in his hand ought to speak of his case being hopeless, for there he is told of a Saviour that saves to the uttermost, and that his wish is that all men should be saved by coming to the knowledge of the truth. What you want is to see God's simple way of accepting the guilty the true ground on which you can be forgiven, and adopted into God's family of love.

I.—I fear that my sins are so great that I cannot be saved at all. They rise up before me like huge dark mountains, so that I cannot see any thing else.

P.—Well, suppose that there was before you a large balance, and that hanging on each end was a scale, and that the perfect atonement which Jesus made for you when he died on Calvary, was put in the one scale, and that your sins, great as they are, were put in the other, which, do you suppose would weigh the most?

I.—O, I see some hope for me in that thought? Yes, the blessed work of Jesus must weigh the most.

P.—Yes, indeed it must. Do you think that it is only little sinners that Jesus is able to save? Has he not already saved some of the greatest sinners that ever lived, and has them

safe with himself at this moment in heaven? Christ is a perfect Saviour. His work is a finished work. The greatest sinner cannot say, his work is not able to meet my case, because my sins are so great. Unless he persists in his unbelief he can be saved, just as he is.

I.—But I cannot see how such a vile sinner can be saved just as I am. I intended to begin to live a better life, to pray a great deal, to do as much good as I could, and then in time, I thought God would forgive me and love me.

P.—Why, my dear sir, God loves you now, has been loving you all along; and while you have been sinning against him all these years, his love has been following you, though he has hated your sin. It was out of love that he gave his son to die for you; and now, at this moment there is nothing between you and full pardon but your own unbelief.

I.—Is it possible that such a sinner as I am can be pardoned now, this very hour? Are you sure of this, sir? It seems too good news to be true.

P.—It is good news, and is as true as the word of God can make it. Just listen to this passage of scripture, 1 John i. 7. “The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us

from all sin." That word is for you as truly as if your name was in the verse, and your very place of abode mentioned.

I.—What a glorious promise! Please let me have the book that I may read it myself.

P.—Yes, truly it is a wonderful text. A great and eminent Author said of it, "It contains all my theology". Our Great High Priest has gone within the vail as our sin cleanser and perpetuated sacrifice. The word you see is in the present tense—"cleanseth"—thus not only meeting the case of our past sins but that of our ever recurring sins in every day life; keeping the conscience free from condemnation, and the way of access open for constant fellowship with God. Thus by faith in his blood we are cleansed from past and present sins; from great sins, and what men call little sins; from sins against light and knowledge, and from sins of ignorance. The blood met the demands of law, not according to what we might think was required, but according to what God saw was required. What the law required was a perfect righteousness, and He who knows no sin was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

I.—I now begin to see how my sins can be put away and yet God's justice be satisfied.

I feel ashamed of myself that I have so long neglected that blessed Bible which contains such comforting words for poor sinners.

P.—It is indeed comforting to know that sin has been atoned for according to God's estimate of its vileness, and not according to our estimate; and that his condemning sentence against it has been fully carried out upon the Lord Jesus. A clear view of this can alone give a steady peace of soul. If sin had not been disposed of according to God's view of it, we could have no permanent peace; for though we might think all was right, the question would still come back, "Is God well pleased with it? for it is with him we have to do.

I.—I think I now see that point clearly. I want to rest only on that which will satisfy the mind of God. I do not want to get comfort from any false hope that in the end would leave me worse than ever. I do not wish to be self-deceived.

P.—That is right. Make sure work for eternity. He who believes in Jesus shall never be confounded. But the ground of our confidence and peace must be alone on Christ's blood shed for us, and not on our own faith in it. Inquirers often make a great mistake here. They keep thinking of their faith, and

wondering if they have the right faith, while their minds are being diverted from the great object of faith—the adorable Saviour. And when they can persuade themselves that they have the right faith, they rejoice in that instead of in Jesus. This is not believing in the Saviour, but only believing that they believe. There is more danger of us believing the wrong thing, than of our believing the right thing in a wrong way.

I.—There is one thing that troubles me, and that is how such a great blessing can come to us simply by believing a truth about Jesus.

P.—Well, my friend, the work of man's salvation was finished on the cross. This we are called upon to believe as a completed fact. Our faith does not make the fact, but rests upon it as established by God's word. The work was done before the faith existed, and was wholly independent of it. Yet unless I believe in that finished work I cannot be saved by it, but am still under condemnation. "He that believeth not, is condemned already." Thus the work of Christ on the cross, eighteen hundred years ago, and my personal interest in it are two different things.

I.—I begin to see why unbelief is spoken of in the bible as such an awful sin, and why

God says, "he that believeth not shall be damned". It cuts the sinner off from all the benefits of the Saviour's death.

P.—Assuredly it does. On Calvary Christ's work filled the well of salvation. It is full, free, and life-giving whether we drink or not. But unless we drink it, we can derive no good from it. So the blood of Jesus was shed for the vilest sinner; but it is only when he sees his lost condition, and by faith makes a personal application of it to his own soul, that its saving power is known. Faith in the blood gives solid peace of mind. It makes the believer an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ. He does not need to plead like the prodigal, "Make me as one of thy hired servants," for he is recognized as a son. Instead of living in dread of his Maker, he can say joyfully, "my beloved is mine and I am his." Andrew Fuller once asked an old lady, who was relating her Christian experience to him. "Were you long in the Slough of Despond?" Her reply was, "I was never there at all; I went at once straight to the Cross of Christ." You must do as the poor Negro said he did, "Fall flat on the promises of God," for they are sure and steadfast.

I.—Thank God for the light I have got upon the truth this evening. I feel that I can

cast myself wholly upon Jesus as my Saviour, "who loved me and gave himself for me."

P.—I am delighted to hear it. And if doubts arise to trouble you, go direct to the word of God, and be guided by that and not by your own feelings. In John iii 36. it is said, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." It does not say that he will get it some time, but that he has it now.

United to Christ, for him there is no longer any condemnation. All his sins are blotted out, and he lives under a sweet sense of acceptance with his heavenly Father. He is a happy man. David says, "Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity." Let this happy state be with you a matter of daily experience. None can pluck you out of the hands of the Saviour, and because he lives, you shall live also. Live near to God in prayer. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths." May his blessing be with you.

CHAPTER II.

ONE WHO HAD "TRIED EVERY WAY" OR WORKS AND FEELINGS.

Inquirer.—I have come to see you sir, in hopes that you will be able to direct me how to get peace of mind. I have tried faithfully every way, to get that rest to my soul that others have found, but all to no purpose as yet. I am very unhappy.

Pastor.—I have no doubt that you have been very earnest in seeking to find rest and peace to your mind. But you are mistaken in saying that you have tried every way. There is one way which you have not tried.

I.—What way can that be, sir?

P.—The right way, my friend. The way of God's own appointing. You know that a person might be very diligent, very earnest in going to a certain town, but unless he takes the right road he will never get there. On one

of our cold mornings, I might try very hard, and with great sincerity to light my fire with pieces of ice, but I could never succeed in that way. In what way have you been trying to find peace?

I.—Well I have been trying to come to God in a right spirit, with a sincere and honest heart; for I know if I do not approach Him in that way He will not receive me. And when I try to pray I feel that my heart is hard and cold, and wanders away so on the world, that my prayers seems just like a mockery, and I rise from my knees quite discouraged.

P.—Do you think if you could come to God with a better heart, with a right spirit, He would receive you then? Is this all you need to give you peace?

I.—Yes, I do think so; but there is where I always fail, and my heart seems to get worse and worse.

P.—But if you could get your heart all right, and could go to God in that right spirit of which you speak, what use in that case would you have for Jesus as a Saviour, to give you access to the heavenly Father?

I.—Realy, I must confess, I did not think of that.

P.—When God gave his own beloved Son to come from his Throne at the very summit of glory, to the misery and mockeries of earth, and to the untold agonies of the death of the cross, it must have been to do something in our salvation that nothing else could effect, and any way of being saved that leaves this out must be all wrong. It is astonishing that you should have thought that you had done every thing to find peace with God, when you had not done the first and only thing that he requires, that is to believe on the Lord Jesus. Let me put the matter in this way, are you to be saved because you have a good heart, or because Jesus paid the penalty for your sins with his own blood?

I.—I see that I have been all wrong. And yet I have always believed that the Lord Jesus is the Saviour of the world. I never doubted that.

P.—Yet that belief did you no good. So little effect did it have upon you that even when you were awakened to see your great danger of being lost, you tried every other way of being saved, but that of simple faith in Jesus. The devils believe in Jesus as the Saviour of the world, and tremble. Many of the worst men now alive believe that, but it does them no good, produces no change in

their hearts or their lives; while true faith makes a man a new creature, that is, truly converts him.

I.—Well, how am I to believe, in order to be right?

P.—I will tell you what you are to believe, which is the vitally important matter. "There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," but the name of Jesus, you must not only believe that Jesus is a Saviour, for devils believe that, all but rank infidels believe that, but you must believe that he is your Saviour; that he surely made a perfect satisfaction for all your sins; and that for the sake of what he has done God can be just and yet pardon you now. This is the way that Paul was saved, for he says, "He loved me, and gave himself for me." And John says, "We loved him because he first loved us." You are perfectly right in wanting and wishing to have a right state of mind, a devotional spirit in coming before God; but where you erred, is in seeking these as a something to recommend you to God, instead of the precious blood of Christ.

I.—I think I begin to see where I have been wrong, but does not the Bible require of us good works, and holy feelings?

P.—The first thing that the Bible requires

of an unconverted man is to believe in the Lord Jesus. Before that he is living in unbelief and that is described as making God a liar. How then can he do any good work while living in such a state? Besides when he tries to be or do any thing good, it is from the motive of doing something that will recommend him to God, something that will procure the Divine favor, for the sake of his own goodness. This must be very displeasing to God, for it is casting dishonor on his Son's work, and putting the performances of the poor sinner in the place of the Lord, our righteousness.

When a sinner comes to Christ just as he is, his faith works by love, and purifies the heart. He then does good works, *not in order to be saved, but because he is saved*, He is not working *for* life, but because he *has* life. His good works are not done from the selfish motive of escaping punishment, but from love to that God, who has given him salvation as a free gift. The love of Christ constrains him; and as his good works come from a right motive, they are well pleasing to God.

I.—O, I see that I was all wrong! I wanted to do something first that would reconcile God to me, and then I thought he would forgive me.

P.—That is a very common, but a very great error. In the first place, God does not need to be reconciled, for he was never in the wrong. Whoever is in that wrong requires to come and be reconciled to the right. It is sinners, then, that need to be reconciled to God; and hence it is written, “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” You see it does not say that he is reconciling himself to the world, but the world to himself. Christ’s object in coming to the world was not that God hated it and was full of wrath against it, and that Christ by dying reconciled him to us. No, Christ’s coming into the world was the result of the father’s love. “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Christ’s death opened a way by which the love that had always existed to sinners could flow in upon us, in consistence with his justice; so that now he can be a just God and a Saviour.

I.—I must say that this gives me an entirely new view of God’s character, and one which is very attractive.

P.—It is only through Jesus Christ that we can get a true view of that character. In our natural state our guilt makes us dread

God, and regard him as our foe. Hence the thought of God makes sinners unhappy, and when they think of approaching him, they suppose that *they* must do something to appease his wrath; and avert from them his vengeance on account of their sins. But when men see God in Christ, their whole nature is changed by the sight. "Aquaint now thyself with Him, and be at peace." This shows that a true knowledge of God gives the soul peace at once. Again we read, "This is eternal life to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." And that there may be no doubt that we can only know God as revealed in Christ, our Lord says, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father" In the gift of Christ to die for our sins, in all that he suffered for us, and in all his gracious invitations, we see the full declaration of Jehovah's love to us.

I.—I am overwhelmed with wonder when I think that all this time when I have been trying to do something to make God love me, he was loving me already, and urging me with loving promises to come to him and be saved.

P.—The awakened sinner can never get the start of God. If he desires to be saved, he finds that the Lord has been longing to save him long ago. When the prodigal made

up his mind to return to his Father, he thought that he must use great intreaty to get into his house even as a servant; but how astonished he must have been, to see the Father running to meet him, and bestowing all the blessings of a son upon him.

In the Highlands of Scotland, a tourist tells us, that he passed through a great many gates where he had to pay money for the privilege of going through. At last he came to one gate, and was putting his hand into his pocket, when a little girl ran in front and locked it. Then she turned to him and said, "You have not got to pay any thing, you have only to say, "please let me go through." The gentleman at once politely made the request, and passed on. The proprietor simply wanted to preserve his right of way. So our being admitted to God's favor, to the household of faith, and to heaven at last, is all of grace, not of works, least any one should boast. The most that any one will be able to say is, "I am a sinner saved by grace."

I.—I thank you for this interview. The Bible seems to me a new Book, and I can say Jesus is now my all in all. I wonder that I so long walked in the dark. May your labours be blessed to many.

P.—I shall be glad to see you again at any time, to speak of these great truths.

CHAPTER III.

I CANNOT BELIEVE FOR MY HEART IS SO HARD.

Inquirer.—I have come, sir, to have some conversation with you about my spiritual state. I cannot get my heart right at all, although I have been seeking it long and very earnestly. I feel that I have a very hard heart.

Pastor.—It is good that you have come to know that. The sinners heart is often at the worst when he thinks it at the best. It is often hardest when he thinks he has a pretty good heart. Pharaoh's heart was so hard that he did not feel its hardness. It is like a man who has got his hand frozen, and does not feel any pain, till circulation begins again to take place, and then he cries out; so when a sinner begins to cry out about the evil of his heart, it is a proof that the spirit of God has been moving upon his mind.

I.—I have sought for a better heart by
(23)

prayer, and by reading the Bible, and by attending the means of grace; but I seem to grow worse, instead of better.

P.—But you know that we must pray in faith, and reading the Bible can only do us good when we believe its truths, and apply them to our own condition.

I.—I think, sir, that I do not clearly understand what this faith is, which I hear you speak so much about in your sermons and addresses.

P.—It is just taking God at his word, or believing what he says to be true. Paul says, in regard to Abraham, that “he believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” Now, to believe in Jesus as having died for your sins, because God has said it, is the faith that saves the soul.

I.—But that seems very simple. Is not there something else required?

P.—No, nothing more. Let me show you this by an illustration used by an Evangelist in England. He was speaking with an inquirer, when he said, “You have heard about the man that is to be executed? “Ah, yes.” Suppose as he lay in the jail, a knock was heard at the door the night before execution, and a gentleman walked in, sat down, and said, you have broken the laws? “Yes, Yes,”

the convict replies. "You have been condemned?" "Yes and justly, too." "And you are to die to-morrow?" "Yes, I am." "Well, I am the Queen's son; I have come from Windsor at her Majesty's request, and this is what I am to do. I will take your prison dress which you have on and sit in your place. The convict is astonished and exchanges dresses; he wonders if he is dreaming; the Prince sits down in the convicts place; in the morning the executioner walks in; he passes the convict; he takes the Prince dressed in the condemned man's dress; he leads him out; he is hanged by the neck till dead; and the man who was condemned walks out free through the open prison doors."

Now this picture though defective in many ways, may give you an idea of Jesus as your Substitute. The word of God says, Christ hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God." When we were yet without strength, Christ died for the ungodly." And again, "While we were yet sinners Christ died for us." You see, then, that salvation is free—free to all; a gift given only through Jesus. It is all of grace from beginning to end.

I.—I see that clearly, and wonder why I did not see it long before now. There is one

passage that has troubled me. It is where our Lord says, "No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

P.—That is a most precious text, and I do not see why it need cause you trouble. Take your own case. The reason why you are here to-night and taking such a deep interest in the affairs of your soul, is that God has been drawing you by his spirit. The reason why you were made to feel under the preaching of the word, was because of this drawing. God draws men by his spirit, by his word, and by his Providence, convicting them of there lost condition; and when he has in great love done so, they often refuse to believe on his Son, professing to wait for more drawing. He has already drawn you to see your need of a Saviour, will you not now at once receive Him by faith?

I.—I do rest on Him now for time and eternity. The way is so easy and simple, that I wonder why I did not see it before; but my mind was darkened by unbelief.

P.—Yes, it is only believe and live; look and be saved. The devoted Mr. M'Cheyne says, "It is almost impossible to explain what it is to come to Jesus, it is so simple."

If you ask a sick person who has been heal-

ed, what it is to come and be healed, he can hardly tell you. As far as the Lord has given me light on this matter, and looking at what my own heart does in like circumstances, I do not feel that there is any thing more in coming to Jesus, than just believe what God says about His Son is true. I believe that many people keep themselves in darkness by expecting something more than this. Some of you will ask, is there no appropriating of Christ? No touching the hem of his garment? I quite grant, beloved, there is such a thing, but do not think that it is separable from believing the record. If the Lord persuaded you of the glory and power of Immanuel. I feel persuaded that you cannot but choose Him. It is like opening the shutters of a dark room; the sun that moment shines in. So the eye that is opened to the testimony of God receives Christ that moment.

I.—I see more clearly that all of our salvation is made to turn upon believing in Jesus. I never understood before that passage, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.” When I first became concerned about my soul, many of my old companions tried to persuade me, that it did not matter

what a man believed, if his conduct only was right.

P.—That is a popular notion with worldly men, but it is a very absurd one. They might as well say; “It matters not how often a man gets drunk if he only keeps sober,” or that it matters not how often a man steals if he only keeps honest.” A man’s belief will influence the whole of his deportment, in proportion as he carries it out in his life; and if it be one that he cannot carry out, what is the use of it?

I.—Yes sir, but they said that all that could be required of any man was to act according to the dictates of his own conscience, and do honestly what is required of him.

P.—That is a great and often fatal mistake. That would be to put conscience in place of the Bible, and to render a revelation from God to his creatures altogether unnecessary. Conscience is not the standard of right, but God’s will is the standard; and that will is revealed to us in the Bible. One man’s conscience tells him to do one thing, another man’s the direct opposite. Paul tells us that when he was persecuting and making havock of the church of Christ, he thought that he was doing God service. He was committing murder conscientiously. It is only when conscience is

educated and enlightened by the word of God, that it is to be relied upon; else it may be taught to call good evil, and evil good. What God will do with the heathen who never have had an opportunity of hearing the gospel, it is not for us to say, for the Judge of all the earth will do right; but in regard to those who hear the gospel the plain declaration is made. "He that believeth not shall be damned." It is said that God spared not his own Son, but it pleased the Father to bruise him; and we may rest assured that if there was any other way by which man could have been saved, His Son would not have been put to death.

I.—I see my way now more clearly, and I think I will be better able to defend the truth.

P.—It is right to defend the truth; but take care of a bitter controversial spirit. It will eat the heart out of your piety. Pray much for opposers, and speak the truth to them in love. This God will bless according to his own blessed promises. Having found the truth you are to be active in bearing it to others. "Let him that heareth, say come." We are to look with a pitying eye upon perishing souls, and exert ourselves to pluck them as brands from the burning.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT CAN I DO FOR JESUS; OR, WHAT
IS ACCEPTABLE SERVICE.

Inquirer.—I have come to see you, dear pastor, to get your advice as to how I can now best work for Jesus, my blessed Saviour, who has done so much for me. I long to do good, and the language of my heart is, “Oh that all my Saviour knew!” And yet when I am asked to take part in any duty I feel so weak, and so pressed under responsibility, that I go home quite discouraged, and feeling as if I had done more harm than good.

Pastor.—If you are going to do good in the church of God, you must be content to do what you can at the time; and not let your mind be diverted from your work by looking at the ability of others, and measuring yourself by them. Many young beginners make a mistake here. Because they cannot pray

or speak as fluently as some others, therefore they will do nothing; or else they work under a depression that keeps them thinking of themselves, instead of looking to God for help.

I.—You are perfectly right, and have described my case exactly. But what am I to do? I have a strong desire to do something to save souls, yet feel as if I could do nothing.

P.—Look at it in this light. If you have a strong desire to save souls, that desire was put there by God himself. Now, God cannot be urging you to work for him, at the same time that he has made you incapable of doing so. The fact that His spirit keeps urging and pressing you to service for the Master, implies that there is something you can do for him, if you are only willing to use a little talent, till he is pleased to give you a larger one; and also to remember that God can work by little gifts as well as by great. It pleases him often to take the weak things of the world to confound the mighty. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord.”

I.—Your remarks give me a great deal of comfort and encouragement. I do believe that it is the Holy Spirit that has given me this strong desire to save souls, for such feelings are not natural to the human heart.

P.—That is true, and remember that if a little of the Spirit of God in you makes you long so much for the highest good of souls, we cannot imagine how great must be God's solicitude for the perishing. The greatness of his love is beyond the grasp of our finite minds. "God only can know the love of God."

I.—That is to me a new idea, and a very solemn one.

P.—It is one we should never forget in our approaches to God. You may have heard some people pray as if they were greatly burdened about souls, and as if God were holding back, and was not willing to bestow the blessing. This is dishonoring to the loving Father, who is far more willing to bless than we are to be blessed. Our faith should lead us to see that if we love souls at all, it is because he gave us that love, and that he has so loved a world of sinners as to give his Son to die for them.

I.—I often wish to take part in the prayer meetings, both by prayer and by making remarks, and yet through diffidence I let the time go by, and come away so condemned in my mind that I have lost all good of the meeting.

P.—I am glad you have mentioned that

subject. It is the duty of young converts to exercise their gifts at once, in the social meetings of the church. By so doing their gifts will grow and strengthen, till they may become very valuable workers in the Lord's service. I have known many who began in a very stammering, blundering way, grow up to be noble instruments in God's hand in turning many to Jesus; when, if they had yielded to that timidity of which you speak, they would have been dumb professors all their lives.

I.—I know it is wrong to let the meetings drag and loose their interest, and I often feel condemned.

P.—But right here a mistake is often made, which I wish to guard you against. It is that of cultivating, what I may call, an artificial conscience, so that you will come away from every meeting in which you have not taken part with a feeling of condemnation. You will hear persons speak of the meeting in which they have taken part as a good one, and that in which they bore no part as the opposite. Now we should only feel condemned when we violate the known will of God. But God has nowhere commanded us to speak at every prayer meeting we attend, whither we have anything to say or not. It is our

duty to so study the Bible that we may have something to say to edification, and then to be ready to say it; but God does not wish us to speak for the sake of soothing an artificial conscience, and going through the form of testifying, when we have no testimony to give.

I.—In my tract district there are a number of persons who are anxious about their souls, and I am often greatly at a loss to know how to direct them.

P.—It is truly solemn and responsible work, but the way that the Lord and his apostles directed anxious souls is upon record for our instruction.

I.—Yes, sir, that is true; but as I am new to this work, I thought from your long experience, you could give me some hints that would be of use to me.

P.—I shall gladly help you all I can. When souls are under conviction of sin, their great desire is to obtain peace of mind. This can be obtained in a wrong way as well as in a right way; and a false hope will give the soul peace for a time, as well the true hope. Hence when an inquirer says he is happy, or that he has found peace, you must try to find out what that is founded upon. Faithfulness to souls requires this of you at once. Giving

improper directions to the awakened often leads to a false security. For example, telling them to go home and pray. It is no doubt the duty of all to pray, but there can be no acceptable prayer but such as goes up through the Lord Jesus; and as long as the sinner is in unbelief the Bible says he is making God a liar, and cannot therefore, be heard at the throne of grace. Besides, he is in danger of going through the mere form of prayer, and settling down upon that as something that will recommend him to God. Now it will not do to put the very best prayer that ever was uttered in the place of Jesus, much less the prayer of unbelief.

I.—But was not the publicans' prayer answered, and also that of the penitent thief on the cross?

P.—No doubt they were, but these were both prayers of faith. The publicans' prayer we know was such, for he went down to his house justified; and the prayer of the thief showed great faith in Jesus, as God, at a time when all things seemed against the idea.

I.—I find that many of the inquirers think that they must wait till they have more feeling, a deeper sense of their sins, before they come to Christ.

P.—O yes! They have great faith in feeling, though not in Christ. The enemy tempts them to delay, rather than come to Jesus at once. Wait, wait, is the cry. Wait for more feeling, for deeper conviction, for a better heart. The enemy of souls does not care how much the sinner may be awakened, nor how serious he may be, if he can only keep him from coming to the blessed Saviour. Hence we must press immediate faith in Christ, as the command of God.

I.—I find that some have been speaking to them against sudden conversions, and telling them that God will bring them out to the light in his own good time.

P.—God's good time is now; "Now is the day of salvation." God now commands the sinner to believe, the Saviour now urges him in the most pressing terms to come, the Holy Spirit urges him to yield the conflict; and to speak as if God was not yet ready to receive him, is a dangerous error. As to sudden conversions the Bible is full of them. Conversion is the first step on the road to heaven, and the first step of a journey is not progressive, but taken at once. Believing is an act of the mind—the act of a moment. "Look unto me, and be ye saved." How quick is a look given! "Hear, and your soul

shall live.” How quick the ear catches the sound of an inviting voice! The light of the truth dawns gradually upon some minds compared with others, but the act of closing in with Christ’s offer is done at once.

When pressing souls to believe in Jesus, you will often be met with the remark, “I have always believed.” They mean that they have always believed something about Jesus; but press them with the inquiry if they believe that he has saved them personally, if they have now peace with God through faith in the blood shed for them, and they will acknowledge that they have not.

I.—I find some who when they discover the remains of sin in their hearts, become discouraged, and fear that they have never been converted at all.

P.—An English evangelist in speaking with a young girl, set that matter before her in a very clear light. He said, “How many persons were crucified on Calvary?” “Three,” she replied, “two thieves, and Jesus between.” “Were both the thieves equally bad?” “Yes, they suffered justly.” “Did both die alike?” “No.” “What made the difference?” “One believed in Jesus, the other did not.” “Now what about sin in regard to these three. The one thief that did

not look to Jesus, had he sin *in* him?" "Yes"
"Had he sin *on* him?" "Yes." And Jesus,
had He sin in him? "She thought a little while,
but gave the right answer, "No." "Had he sin
on him?" "Yes." "His own?" "No."
"The thief that looked to Jesus, had he sin
in him after he looked?" "Yes." "Had he
sin on him?" "No." Thus the cross still
divides the world. The whole race is divided
into saved or unsaved.

"Trust Him, cling to him, O believe Him,
All was done thy trust to gain;
On him rest, and now receive him,
And with Him for ever reign."

CHAPTER V.

I BELIEVE BUT MY HEART
IS SO COLD.

Inquirer.—I have heard you, sir, invite professing Christians as well as others, to call upon you for religious conversation; and although I am not a member of your church, I have taken the liberty to come.

Pastor.—I am very glad to see you, and I hope that our interview may be blessed to us both.

I.—I have been a professing Christian for many years, but I get along so poorly that I am often discouraged. My prayers are cold and dead, and when I read the Bible I do not get the comfort from it that I hear others speak of; and I seem to make no progress in the christian life.

P.—Well, perhaps the reason you get no comfort from the word of God is, that you

go to it with your mind fixed upon your own need of comfort, instead of seeking to find Jesus in it, the true source of comfort. Thus instead of thinking of the dear loving heart of your best friend, who was speaking to you when you read the Bible, you have been watching your own heart to see if the comfort you expected was springing up there.

I.—That is a new thought to me; but I do not doubt but that I have erred in that way.

P.—Yes, and I think you will find the same thing true in regard to the coldness of your heart in prayer. When you have gone to the throne of grace, you have thought more about you own cold heart, than of that warm, glowing heart of love, that was pierced by the soldier's spear for you on the cross. We can never get comfort, either from the Bible or in prayer, by looking at our own heart. In a cold winter day a person would never get warm by thinking and speaking of the cold, but by going to the fire; and so we may settle it in our minds that all comfort, all good, all spiritual life, must come from outside of ourselves, even from Him in whom dwells the fullness of God.

I.—I see where I have been wrong, and I think I shall avoid the error for the future, by God's grace. I want to ask you about

another matter. I heard you speak lately on the faith of assurance, now do you think that none are really converted who do not have assurance?

P.—No I would not say that. I know that there are different degrees of faith—weak faith and strong faith, and yet the weak may be real faith as far as it goes. Still, it should be borne in mind that the only reason why any one has not a steady knowledge of their acceptance with God, is because of unbelief. They may have faith, but there is much unbelief mixed with it; and this unbelief is very displeasing to God.

I.—That makes the matter somewhat plainer. I acknowledge that my mind is often full of doubts and fears, and I long for certainty in this matter.

P.—Mr. Varley tells of a circumstance which occurred when he was in Toronto. A young man in the University had been preaching for three years, and never knew that he was saved. The Evangelist says. “He came to me, and I said to him very quietly.” “Do you believe in the Son of God?” “I do.?” I said “Tell me what you believe concerning him.” His answer was, “I believe that He died for my sins.” I asked, “Do you believe that your sins were laid on Jesus? The

Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all." He turned and said, "I never thought of it in that light." "Do you believe that God laid your iniquities on his Son?" "Yes I do." "Why do you say that?" I said. "Because it is in God's word," he replied. I then said to him, "Brother, where is your sin?" He was quite startled by the question, it was a new question to him. He said, "Christ must have taken it." I said, "You seem surprised, brother; why, God has been telling you that for more than twenty years." Then he read the verse, "He that believeth in Him is not condemned," and he said with great joy, "I am not condemned; I know it because God says so."

I.—That really makes the gospel good news. I often thought it was inconsistent to say we believe the gospel, and yet live in doubts and fears, nearly the whole of our lives.

P.—That reminds me of a conversation between a Sabbath School teacher and her scholar, which I have somewhere seen. The lesson for the day included our Lord's words, "Verily I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life." A little girl inquired, "Is that true, is that surely true?" "Oh yes," said the teacher, "it is surely true." "It must be very nice," said the child,

“to have everlasting life and to know that, whatever happens, you are saved.” “Yes, it is a great blessing indeed,” said the teacher. “Then you are saved, are you not?” said the scholar. “I hope so.” said the teacher. “Hope so !” exclaimed the little one, “I thought you told me just now that it was sure enough.” Now persons who live in this state of doubt and uncertainty, are generally found fixing their thoughts upon themselves, their feelings, their frames of mind and emotions, rather than upon Christ. What is called assurance of faith is not the privilege of apostles or a few eminent saints, but of all who take God at his word, and rest by faith upon what he says as to the all cleansing power of Christ’s blood.

I.—That is different from what I have been taught on this subject; I have always understood that it was something exceptional and extraordinary in Christian experience, to be sure of our salvation.

I.—It was not so evidently in primitive times, and it is not so where the true nature of the Gospel as a full, free, and present salvation is preached and received. Christ’s work was a finished work! his sacrifice for sinners has an infinite value, his righteousness is a perfect one, clothed in which his people are

to be presented at last without spot or blemish. If a man professes to believe in Jesus, and yet has no peace, no joy, no confidence of his acceptance, but is going on in a blind doubting way, hoping for the best, it is evident that he does not see the infinite value of Christ's blood, or he would not by doubt cast dishonor upon it. If Jesus has satisfied for me the claims of the law, if God is satisfied with what has been done in my stead, why should not I be satisfied? If He is satisfied and well pleased with his Son's work, why should not I believe him when he says so, and have done with this disheartening doubt and uncertainty.

I.—I have noticed that in New Testament times the Christians spoke much more confidently of their state than most professors do now. For example, "We know that we have passed from death unto life." "We know that when the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens;" and many other passages of a like kind.

P.—That is truth. The gospel is glad tidings of great joy, and where-ever it was published by the apostles it made those who believed it happy. Phillip preached it in Samaria, and there was great joy in that city.

If you had met one of those happy converts and had asked, "do you know that your sin's are forgiven, do you know that God is well pleased with you for his Son's sake?" Would he have put on a sad face, heaved a deep sigh, and said, "Well, sir, I am hoping for the best; I am praying and looking for happy feelings to spring up in my heart; and doing the best I can." When the Eunuch mentioned in Acts 8. heard the gospel, he believed it at once, and "went on his way rejoicing."

I.—I heard a person lately say, that he considered it presumption for any one to be so confident of his salvation, as some people professed to be.

P.—The Christians of Paul's day, instead of thinking it presumption to know that they were saved, were encouraged to "have boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Jesus," and "to draw nigh in the full assurance of faith;" a faith that rests upon God's eternal truth, and that the combined powers of earth and hell can never destroy. John says, "These things I write unto you that believe in the name of the Son of God, that ye may know that ye have eternal life."

In those days your poor, doubting, fearing, hesitating professors, whose eyes are always turned in upon their own hearts to find out if

they are saved, instead of being fixed on Jesus, would have a poor appearance in facing prisons, tortures, flames, and death in its most horrible forms. The primitive Christians knew whom they had believed, and were, therefore, enabled to rejoice in tribulation, to take joyfully the spoiling of their goods, and to count not their lives dear unto them for their Lord's sake. And such Christians we need now, as much as they did then, men and women who know their Lord's voice, and follow him; and who go forth to conquer under a banner which has inscribed upon it, "We know that our Redeemer liveth."

I.—We certainly need such a religion now as much as they did then; for though we cannot be dragged to prison, or to the stake for our religion, yet we are met on every hand, with infidelity in its vilest forms, and most dangerous aspects; and we should be able to show that we know that we stand upon the Rock of Ages, and that we feel an assured confidence in reading God's word.

P.—I am glad to hear you speak thus. Infidelity is a system of negations, of doubt and uncertainties. It speaks of what is not, but does not tell us what is. It seeks to rob the soul of its trusts for eternity, and then leaves its poor plundered victim to die in despair.

One of them says there is no God, another tells us that matter is eternal, that matter made itself, and that it is no matter whether it did or not. Here is a man who tells us that he came from the monkey race; which race came from some other race; and you would have a hard race to trace the thing up to where his driveling nonsense points.

Now the gospel, when believed, gives assurance and confidence for the present and the future. Its language is, "Fear not, for unto you is born a Saviour who is Christ the Lord." I rejoice in the many converts that are now turning to the Lord, and I want them to grow up strong in the faith, confident in the power of atoning blood, and not by doubts and fears, and gloomy aspects, bring a reproach upon the gospel.

I.—I am sure that I could be more useful to others, if I lived this constant life of faith, I am often kept from speaking to others, by my own doubts.

P.—Yes, that is the natural result. "I believe, therefore, have I spoken." I was delighted in reading lately about the conversion of a British nobleman, the late Earl of Ducie. He rejoiced in the full assurance of faith. When dying he gathered his servants round his bed and said, "I would not pass

away without saying a word to you, to let you know what the Lord has done for me. A short time since my heart was cold, and dead, and obdurate; but now He has turned my darkness into light. It is not of myself, no work of my own but of grace. I have no doubts; no, I could not doubt; do not you doubt, for the vilest have obtained mercy. May the peace of God be with you all; and may the light of his countenance shine upon you, as it does upon me this moment."

Speaking of assurance, he said, "I have it through Jesus more and more every hour. It is not presumption; oh, no, I do not presume. "Do not think it presumption; it would be presumption to doubt." To his friends he said at another time, "I thank God I have a Saviour, and such a Saviour! Never doubt him. Oh, what a God he has been to me! If one sinner was ever greater than another, I am he; but Christ saves to the uttermost. "I have no fears nor doubts."

I.—Ah, those dying words are refreshing. I feel that they have strengthened my faith greatly. Those words of his are very striking. It would be presumption to doubt."

P.—Yes, both striking and true. It is very sad that any professing Christian should be content to live in uncertainty, when Jesus

has laid such a foundation for perfect confidence. But stranger and sadder still, that any can be found thinking that their very doubts are evidence of the reality of their piety; as if unbelief could be the proof of their faith, and distrust the evidence of confidence. Why do those who ought to know better, cling to their doubts as if there was something blessed in uncertainty? What comfort can it bring amid the trials and burdens of life? It is itself the greatest burden, and enveloping us in a thick cloud of night, hinders us from walking with God who is light and love.

Be assured, my dear friend, that the gospel does not encourage doubts, nor permit us to call them by the name of humility. It enables the believer to say, "The Beloved is mine, and I am His. It is not that he hopes to be His, or that he ought to be His, but that he is His. "He that believeth on me hath everlasting life." Our Great Substitute has paid the penalty, and satisfied the claims of the law; and faith identifies us with Him, so that we can no more be lost than He can be lost; and sure as He is in glory, so sure is it that His people will be there with Him "He will not be in glory, and leave me behind." "Because I live, ye shall live also," are His own words. We are made partakers of Christ,

that is fellow-sharers, fellow-partners with him in all that he has. Oh, how exalted the Christian's privileges! We live in God, we are the temple of God, the Lord is our portion and our heritage forever. Let us say I will trust Him and not be afraid.

I.—A correct view of our Lord Jesus as our substitute, and a firm faith in His finished work, is I see the true remedy for these doubts I have spoken about.

P.—Let me give you an illustration before you go. There were two boys who lived in the north of Scotland. In childhood they played together, and loved one another, but as they grew towards manhood their paths separated. Years passed away, and they met again, but not as they had parted. One of them was a criminal brought before the court to receive his sentence, and the other was the judge upon the bench, who was to pass the sentence. The prisoner hoped, as he recognized the judge as his former playmate, that he would be let off easy. After the case had been stated, the judge called for the book of law, in which the penalty attached to the crime was written. There were two extremes, the smallest and the greatest sum.

The prisoner hoped that the judge, for the sake of their old friendship, would give him

the least; but the judge ordered that he should pay the heaviest sum, a sum so great that he could not pay it, and would therefore be condemned to life-long imprisonment. His head sank in sadness upon his breast when he heard the voice of his judge saying, "George, George, my old friend, I have judged you as a just judge, and now I will save you as a friend. I have indeed fixed the heaviest penalty, but I intend to pay it all myself, and you are free."

Let this remind us of Him who paid the full penalty which justice demanded, that we might be forever saved.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BACKSLIDER.

Pastor.—You seem to be in much distress of mind about something; can you tell me what it is?

Inquirer.—Under the sermon last evening I was led to see my dreadful guilt and apostasy. I once knew the Lord Jesus as my Saviour, but by my sinful life I have put Him to an open shame, crucified him afresh.

P.—Well I am glad that you have been led by the Spirit of God to see your guilt, and, in some measure, to know your danger.

I.—To you think, sir, that it is possible for me to be again received back into God's favor?

P.—What I think about it would be of

very little consequence. We must try and find out what is God's mind on the matter. Do you think that God did once accept you, for Jesus sake, though you were a poor lost, unworthy sinner.

I.—Yes; I have no doubt of that, I lived for years in the sweet enjoyment of peace with God.

P.—That being the case, do you think that the gracious Lord that received you as a guilty sinner then, has changed since that time? Do you think that the precious blood of Jesus has lost its efficacy?

I.—I cannot really think that there can be any change in the love of God, or in the power of the Saviour's blood; but still I can find no rest or peace in mind, for my sins are ever before me.

P.—You never will find rest and peace in that way. You see your great sins, and the guilt of your backsliding. your conscience is awakened, and utters the condemning voice. You are filled with trouble and almost plunged into despair, and keep looking at the darkness and misery of your own mind to get comfort. You might as well approach an iceburg to get warmed.

I.—You surely do not think that it is wrong for me to feel deeply distressed about my

great sin in forsaking the Lord?

P.—No it is perfectly right that you should feel so; but it is wrong from you to stop there. You might look at and bewail your sins for millions of years, and yet be no better than now. You must think of God's mind concerning you. You can know what He thinks of your case by what He says. "Return unto me ye backsliding people, and I will heal your backslidings, and love you freely." What was the cause of your backsliding?

I.—I was a member of a Christian Church. I became very much engrossed by business. I first began to neglect secret prayer, showing the truth of what you said in your sermon last evening, that backsliding generally begins at the closet door. Then I ceased to attend the weekly prayer meeting, and when I did go seldom took part in the services; then I began to take less interest in reading my Bible, and read books of a trifling kind. A little thing was made an excuse for my staying away from the house of God on the Sabbath; and in short, I soon found that my heart had become as hard and cold as a stone, and when I tried to pray the heavens seemed as brass to my cry. O my cup of woe was filled to the brim! I feared my soul was lost forever.

P.—Your case, my friend, is a sad one, but

it is not hopeless. All through your wanderings the eye of your heavenly Friend has been upon you for good. Your soul has been very precious in His sight. He did not give you up nor forget you though you forgot Him. It was He who sent afflicting Providences to arouse you from your sleep of sin; and it was he who sent his Holy Spirit to arouse you to your present sense of danger of being forever lost.

I.—Indeed, sir, I have feared that I had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, which can never be forgiven.

P.—In a sense all sin is a sin against the Holy Ghost; but the sin that the Lord speaks about there, is blaspheming against the Holy Spirit, and which I think consisted in attributing the wonderful miracles of our Lord to Satanic influence. You must not let the enemy of souls draw you into the depths of despair; for his way is first to persuade souls that there is no danger in living in sin, and then to lead them to think that there is no mercy for them at all.

I.—Then what am I to do to get back the peace I once had?

P.—Do just what your Lord tells you; cast yourself upon the merits of Christ's blood, that

blood which cleanses from all sin. As the good old hymn says:—

“Blood has a voice to pierce the skies,
Vengeance the blood of Able cries;
But the dear stream when Christ was slain
Speaks peace as loud from every vein.”

This reminds me of an anecdote which I have read. Some years ago two soldiers belonging to the British army, stationed at Gibraltar, were, in the mercy of God, brought to a knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. Though living in that secluded spot, and with few opportunities of hearing the glorious gospel yet they were led to read the Bible together, and the still small voice of God, speaking in His word, had brought to their hearts conviction of sin. One found peace through faith in the blood of atonement. One evening these soldiers were placed as sentries at opposite ends of a sallyport, or long passage, leading from the rock of Gibraltar to the Spanish territory. One of them as I said was rejoicing in the Saviour, while the other was in a state of deep conviction of sin. On the evening referred to, one of the officers who had been dining, was returning to the garrison at a late hour, and coming up to the sentry on the outside of the sallyport, and who was the soldier lately converted, he asked as usual

for the watchword. The man absorbed in meditation on the glorious things that had lately been unfolded to him, replied to the officer's challenge with the words, "the precious blood of Christ." He soon recovered himself and gave the right answer; but his comrade heard the words, and they came home to his heart like a voice from heaven. His load of guilt was removed and peace flowed into his soul. So I want you to turn your attention from yourself and your sins, to the precious blood which alone can restore you to peace.

I.—I thank God for the comfort that thought brings to my mind. That blood I see must be my only refuge.

P.—Yes and you could not have a better one, for it is of God's making. And let me suggest another thought in the same connection; it is that of your Saviour as the Great Advocate above. "If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." Through Him we can go and confess our sins, and God is faithful and just while He forgives our sins for His sake.

I.—O why did I ever sin so deeply against so good a God! When I think of my sins with their great aggravations, it seems to me at times as if I could not be forgiven.

P.—I do not wish to make you think less

of the great guilt of your sins, but more of the mighty grace of God in Christ. You departed from God after all He did for you, showing great ingratitude and resistance of light and knowledge and you should be very thankful that He did not leave you in hardness of heart, but aroused you to see your guilt and danger.

I.—I do thank God for that. He might have given me up, and have said, “He is joined to his Idols, let him alone!”

P.—David, when awakened from his backsliden state, prayed “Quicken me according to thy judgements.” God took him at his word and by the most terrible works of judgements followed him in his wanderings. These, David was enabled to see, were all sent in love; for he says, “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, Thou wilt revive me.” Then he was made, like you, to reflect upon his guilt; the secret, hidden evil of his heart was discovered and confessed to God; then his proud confidence in himself was shaken, and he was made to see that he could only stand in the divine strength.

I.—While you were speaking I was led to remember how the dear Saviour restored Peter to His favor after his fall, and the thought has encouraged me to trust that he

will bless me.

P.—Yes, how loving and tender was our Lord's way of dealing with backsliding Peter. There was no loud, wrathful word, no bitter, angry denunciation, no revengeful threat; there was not even a word spoken, only a look: but oh what a look that must have been! flashing upon Peter's soul the remembrance of all his Lord's past kindness in contrast to his own present ingratitude. It was a soul-piercing, heart-breaking look; and Peter under its influence, went out and wept bitterly. It led him to reflection as in the case of the backsliding church at Ephesus. Our Lord's words to them were, "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent and do thy first work." The man who has been wandering from God is often stopped in the whirl of the excitement of business and pleasure, and laid upon a bed of sickness. In a quiet darkened room, through long, dull days and sleepless nights, he is compelled to think. Or, by some severe and unexpected stroke, his friends are taken away from him, a wife or a child that he has most tenderly loved; and thus he is made to feel the emptiness and vanity of earth, and turns to his long-forsaken God.

I.—I thank God that He has restored my

soul, and my peace now flows like a river. I can now say with Peter, "Lord thou knowest all things, Thou knowest that I love Thee." I have been forgiven much, may I from this time love much.

P.—God grant that it may be so. Love to Christ is the Great vital power of all true religion. "The love of Christ constraineth me," is to be our watch word. All obedience that does not spring from this motive will be very fitful and uncertain. When the heart is filled with Christ's love, his yoke will be felt easy, and his burden light; and what to others might seem burdensome duties, love makes delightful privileges. For your future guidance let me direct your attention to the words of Dr. Guthrie, "If you find yourself beginning to love any pleasure better than your prayers, any book better than your Bible, any house better than God's, any table better than the Lord's, any person better than your Saviour, any one better than your soul, a present indulgence better than the hopes of heaven—TAKE ALARM."

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